

Instructors' Views on EDC Class Size

A report on a questionnaire survey

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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire survey was administered to investigate instructors' views on the EDC class size. An analysis of the results suggested that class size seems to be an important factor in CLT curricula as it affects EDC instructors' formative assessment approach. This paper will conclude with a discussion of the implications of instructor views in a curriculum evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

In 2003, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology released its action plan to reform English education in order to develop Japanese people's English abilities. Their stated goals for junior and senior high school English education are focused on developing basic English communication skills, and their stated goal for university is developing students' ability to use English at work upon their graduation, building onto the basic communication skills learned in secondary education. The overall goal is to bring Japanese people's English level to "average world standards based on objective indicators such as STEP, TOEFL, and TOEIC" (Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2003). Following this set of goals, many Japanese universities offer TOEIC or TOEFL courses as well as oral communication courses employing a Communicative Language Teaching (hereafter CLT) approach. These courses seem to meet students' demands. For example, standardized tests, especially TOEIC, are widely regarded as objective indicators of one's English level by companies, thus from students' perspective having high scores increases their chances to get into prestigious companies. Students are also interested in taking oral communication classes as they do not have confidence in their productive skills: while they have learned English grammar and vocabulary to a certain degree prior to university, there is a gap between their receptive and productive English skills. In addition, universities are reducing the typical class size of 40 students. New programs, with student numbers ranging from 4 to 20 students, are promoted as being more effective due to the small class size, thus many universities have introduced their "small class size" English courses in order to promote their English education curricula to prospective high school students. Given these trends, Rikkyo University launched an English oral communications course called English Discussion Class (hereafter EDC), with 8 students per class, in 2009 as a pilot program, and the course became compulsory for all freshman students in 2010.

BACKGROUND

Teaching Approach and Class Size

The starting point for developing EDC curriculum was to create a small size compulsory English oral communication course for all freshman students in an attempt to better help them develop communicative competence. The first tasks for the initial curriculum developers of EDC were to decide on the basic structure, namely its teaching approach and class size. CLT was the obvious choice for them as the method of instruction as numerous theoretical and empirical studies in the Second Language Acquisition (hereafter SLA) field have shown its effectiveness in teaching speaking (Brown, 2007, Nunan, 1998; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; and Tsang & Wong, 2002). However, what proved challenging was to decide on the number of students per class. The following were the steps taken to decide on the standard class size for EDC.

Step 1: Academic Literature – The initial curriculum developers first sought the answer in academic literature. There is much published research and many textbooks about what to do in CLT classrooms. There are also many “how to” books for teachers: these books introduce various CLT tasks to develop students’ communicative competence (Folse, 2006, Lee, 2000; Willis & Willis, 2007; Willis, 2001). It is often the case that such tasks are explained with suggested numbers of students for tasks to be carried out to meet the task goals, and class size is, if at all, dealt in a way to provide advice for adapting such tasks successfully to different class sizes such as large classes. There are also some teaching communities that offer advice on class size in ESL/EFL through their websites (American Language Communication Center (ALCC) and Teach-This.com are some examples among others). However, such discussions are generally limited to the advantages and disadvantages of small or big class sizes with regard to classroom management issues. In short, it seemed that the relationship between class size and learning outcomes is one area that is under-researched in SLA.

Step 2: Visiting Other Universities - As academic literature did not provide any useful information about class size, the initial curriculum developers visited other universities that offered small size English courses. They visited two universities, one with 4-student classes and other with 12-student classes. Listening to hands-on experiences from course developers at these two universities gave them ideas on which they based their discussion to determine the number of students per class.

Step 3: Even or Uneven - From the visits to other universities and from their own experiences and intuition, the initial curriculum developers decided that the standard number of EDC class size should be an even number. Classes with an even number of students have two major advantages: 1) students can be put in pairs easily, and 2) students can be put in two groups of an even number. Therefore, in even-numbered classes, the teacher does not have to be a partner in pair-work tasks or fill in the missing role in a group.

Step 4: 4, 6, 8, or 10 - Once the decision was made to make the number even, the next step was to decide on the exact number. The initial curriculum developers had had the idea that the number should be 10 or below to make the course unique to Rikkyo University and thus attractive to students; therefore, they looked at possibilities of making EDC a 4-, 6-, or 8- student course. One issue that the university was concerned with small size classes was the potential to create unnecessary anxiety for students. Since there had not been such small size English classes at Rikkyo, (the previous practice was to place 40 to 50 students per English class on average), the university was worried that students would show a great deal of anxiety and feel pressure to speak English in small classes, and such a classroom environment might prove counterproductive to students’ learning. Therefore, the class size needed to be a number that would achieve the educational goals in addition to alleviating the concern shown by the university. Four was ruled out first as they thought students’ anxiety would be high. Ten was also ruled out at an early stage as they felt it would be difficult for teachers to manage and monitor all 10 students at the same time. Then they were left with choices of 6 or 8. They felt that either would work for teachers, but eight would be more appropriate as it provides more opportunities for students to work with different partners, and yet there are enough students to keep the anxiety level low.

Current Class Size

The idea to place eight students per class was approved by the university and it was decided that

students were to be grouped by levels within the same department. Inevitably, the number of students in each department is not always divisible by 8 so that eight plus or minus one became the class size criterion (now every semester, 75 to 80% of the students are placed in 8-student classes, 10 to 14% in 7-student classes, and 8 to 10% in 9-student classes on average). Then the succeeding curriculum developers (i.e., EDC program managers in consultation with the deputy director and senior program managers) designed and developed the syllabus including in-house textbooks, and provided teacher training sessions so that EDC could take the most advantage of the class size. In other words, the EDC curriculum was designed around the class size of eight: in principle, all the activities were designed for pair-work and small group discussions with four students (see Hurling, 2012 for details of EDC lesson structure).

Why “8” Works

In 2012, as the program matured, the curriculum developers were confident the EDC curriculum was established at a high level of quality, and that the class size was strongly connected to the high levels of achievement and satisfaction with EDC. Every semester, attendance and passing rates have been stable at the high end of the scale, and the student questionnaire conducted at the end of each semester since EDC's full implementation in 2010 suggest that the majority of the students feel that their speaking skills have improved (on average, almost 85% of the respondents agrees that they can speak English better than before after completing their first semester, and over 80% after completing their second semester), and that they have appreciated the learning experience in EDC. At the same time, there was growing interest about the number of students per class both within and outside the university: people wanted to know why EDC had set the standard number of students per class to be eight, and why it works. As mentioned above, lack of academic literature on the relationship between class size and learning outcomes in CLT classrooms made it difficult for the initial curriculum developers to come up with a class size that was theoretically and empirically supported. Thus, they had to rely on their experiences and intuition to make the decision on EDC class size instead. The same problem still existed in 2012, thus as an attempt to provide comprehensive and solid answers to the latter part of the question, why eight works, the curriculum developers conducted a questionnaire to EDC full-time instructors. They considered these instructors to be the best source of information when investigating what actually happens in EDC classrooms as they are the frontline practitioners of EDC curriculum.

DESIGN

Purpose

The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain EDC full-time instructors' views on the class size.

Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was developed by the curriculum developers. It consists of 6 sections: the first section asks for reasons why instructors think EDC is effective in developing students' speaking skills (within EDC, it is a commonly understood that being “effective” means that students achieve the aims of the course, namely developing fluency in the context of discussions), and the second section asks for reasons why they think EDC is popular among students. The aim of these sections were to find out whether or not instructors considered the small class size to be a major reason for EDC's educational effectiveness and popularity among students and to what degree.

The third section onward relates to specific class size. The third section asks about 9- student classes and 5- student discussion groups. At a glance, these numbers did not suggest any

substantial differences from 8-student classes or 4-student group discussions, which are standard in EDC. Therefore, curriculum developers hoped to find out instructors' views on these numbers. The fourth and fifth sections ask about 10-student classes. Currently, EDC does not offer 10-student classes; however, one specific question asked by the university regarding the class size was whether or not increasing the standard class size to 10 was feasible. Similar to the previous section, 10-student classes do not seem to differ greatly from existing 8- or 9- student classes on the surface, yet curriculum developers hoped to provide commonly held views among instructors as an answer to the question by the university.

Lastly, the sixth section asks about what instructors considered to be the ideal number of students per class.

Data Collection

Respondents of the questionnaire were 26 EDC full-time instructors with teaching experience of four semesters or more at EDC in May, 2012. The questionnaire was sent electronically to the instructors on May 7, 2012. The deadline was within a week, by May 11, 2012, and all of the twenty six instructors returned the questionnaire. Of the 26 responses, 2 were incomplete; therefore, a total of 24 responses were discussed and analyzed.

RESULTS

Section 1: Reasons for effectiveness of EDC

In this section, instructors were asked to choose what they considered to be the top three reasons for effectiveness of EDC. They were given seven options including an option for "other." All the options except for "other" are commonly agreed key aspects of EDC curriculum. The option of "other" was included in case instructors had other applicable responses for the question. These options were then followed by a comment section in which instructors were free to comment on their choices. Figure 1 below summarizes the result in percentages.

In addition to listing their top three choices, all the instructors provided comments for each of their choices. Fifty-four percent of the instructors chose "Micro class size" as their top reason. Analyzing their comments, there seem to be two main educational benefits that "Micro size class" brings to their classroom. They reported that it allows them to monitor their students' performance closely, and therefore, they are able to provide specific and actionable feedback that would make positive changes in students' behaviors. Another benefit that came up in their discussion often was that it helps create a relaxed learning environment for students because students get to know each other well and form friendship through discussions in English.

What should be emphasized here is that almost all of the instructors explained how their three choices were interrelated and complemented one another. Therefore, perhaps equally, if not more, worth looking at is the total number of responses for each of the choices regardless of the ranking. Figure 2 below is the summary of the results in percentages.

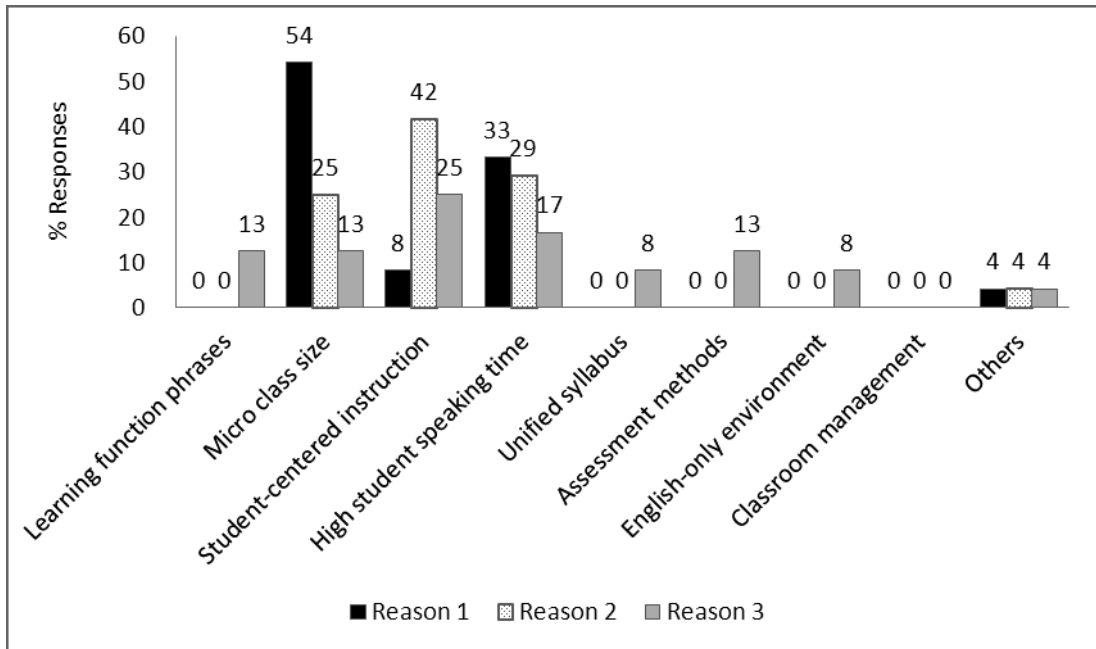


Figure 1. Top 3 reasons for effectiveness of EDC. Reason 1 is the first choice. Reason 2 is the second choice. Reason 3 is the third choice.

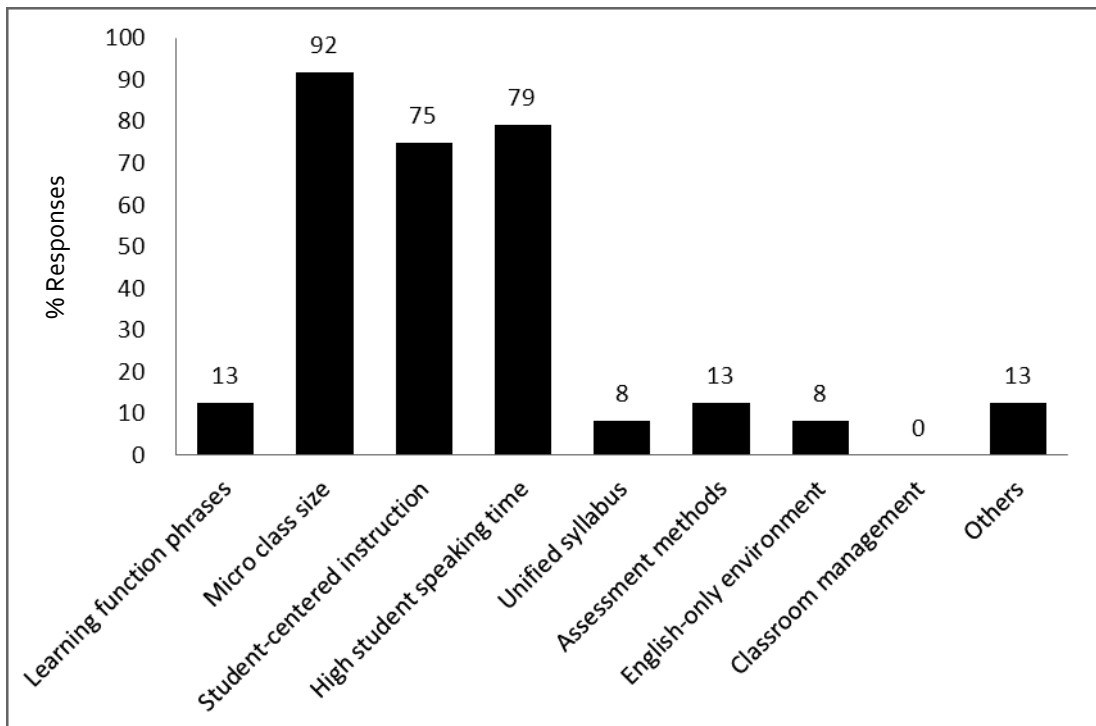


Figure 2. Total responses for each item.

As shown in Figure 2 above, “Micro size class” (92%), “High student speaking time” (79%), and “Student-centered instruction” (75%) are by far the most commonly agreed reasons for the effectiveness of EDC among instructors. Fifty-four percent of the instructors chose the combination of these three as their top three reasons and explained how they are intertwined. The following comments are examples of this “reciprocal” view.

“Small class size allows us to monitor closely and to maintain an English-only environment in which there is a lot of student-student interaction. This high student speaking time means that students have a lot of time to practice the skills and improve their English ability. Making the classes student-centered is part of maintaining high student speaking time.”

“The small class size makes ALL the other points possible – the students get to know their classmates well so that even after 1 or 2 classes they feel very comfortable taking for a long time and taking risks in English. Due to the small classes, teachers are able to monitor ALL students at ALL times, so we can spot any difficulties (or classroom management issues) and tailor our feedback/further activities to address them. This is also motivating for the students- they know that teachers are listening (and assessing performance every week), so they try their best to use only English, stay on-topic and perform the function phrases.”

Section 2: Reasons for EDC’s popularity among students

In this section, instructors were asked to choose top three reasons for EDC’s popularity among students. The answer options and the format is the same as the previous section. As mentioned earlier, EDC receives high ratings from students in the end of the semester questionnaire, but the questionnaire items are generally related to learning outcomes (e.g., Do you think your speaking skills have improved by taking EDC?) rather than the structure of EDC. Instructors’ perceptions of students’ perceptions of EDC obtained in this section, therefore, provided additional useful information to understand how students feel about the structure of EDC. Figure 3 below summarizes the results in percentages.

As shown in Figure 3, “Micro class size” and “High student speaking time” are what instructors perceived to be the most apparent reasons for EDC’s popularity among students. In regards to these two points, instructors reported that their students often said they rarely had had opportunities to practice speaking skills nor had they had any experiences in learning English in such a small class prior to EDC. In addition, many instructors discussed the social benefits of EDC for students; it is easy for students to form friendship, and it helps create motivating classroom environment for them. This suggests that students enjoy the new learning experiences that EDC offers. The comments below reflect instructors’ experiences of hearing students’ actual voices in their classrooms, and the tone is quite positive, which is representative of other comments.

“I heard many students saying that they didn’t like their English classes at high school where they studied passively, didn’t have enough speaking time to practice or communicate in English. On the other hand, they seem to enjoy our program, which provides the opposite. Of course is quite effective mainly because students are given considerable amount of speaking time and this was made possible by student-centered instruction and its micro class size.”

“Students often say they have never had the opportunity to speak so much English before! The micro class size, and student centered instruction, gives them the opportunity to build close relationships with each other- they aren’t just another student in a lecture hall.”

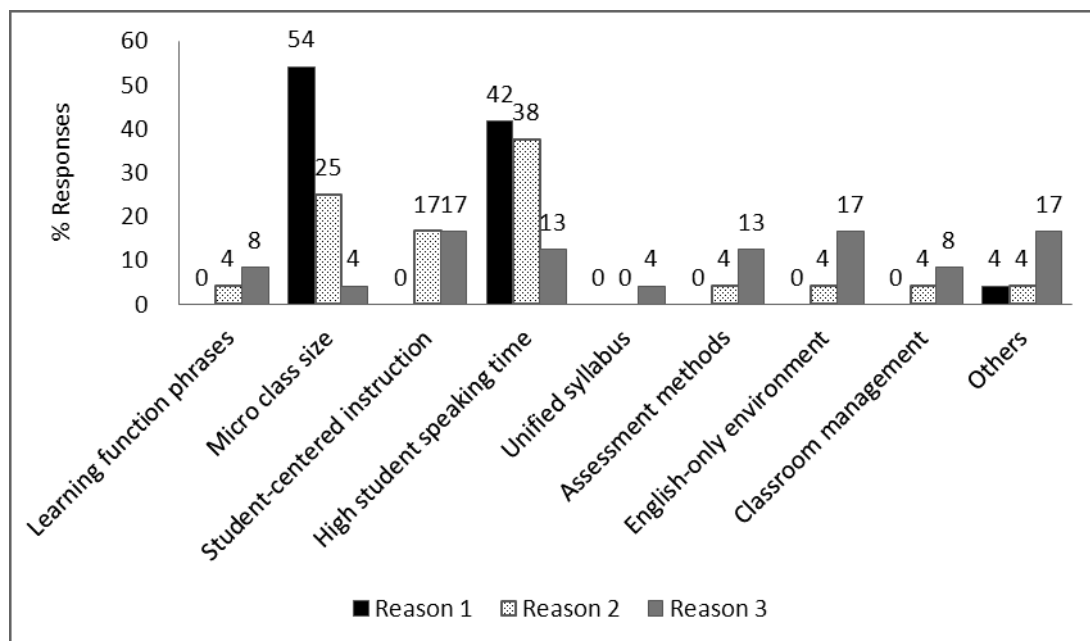


Figure 3. Top 3 Reasons for EDC's popularity among students from instructor perspective. Reason 1 is the first choice. Reason 2 is the second choice. Reason 3 is the third choice.

Section 3: Effectiveness of 9-student classes

All the instructors had experiences teaching 9-student classes; therefore, 24 responses were obtained. The two questions asked were as follows: a) in terms of effective teaching and learning, do you see any differences between 8- and 9- student classes? and b) during group discussions in 9-student classes, students are divided in groups of three in order to maximize student-student interaction time. If we change this format to two groups of four and five, do you think there would be any differences in students' performance and learning outcomes? There were yes or no answer choices and a comment section for each question.

For the first question, out of 24 instructors, twenty three (96%) chose “yes,” and one chose “no.” Instructors' comments suggest that there are three potential disadvantages of 9-student classes. First is the possible reduction in student speaking time: some activities have to be done in groups of three rather than in pairs, and this reduces speaking time per student. Second is the possible reduction in number of opportunities that shy students practice speaking skills: when working in three, students tend to become less aware of equal participation, thus forgetting to invite quieter students to join discussions. The one respondent who chose “no” also commented on this point. He reported that while he had not noticed any extreme differences, he had to be very careful with his instructions so that all the students in groups of three would have the same amount of opportunity to speak. Third is in relation to monitoring: because there are three discussion groups to monitor, instructors' assessment of students' performance could become less accurate, and this might result in providing generic feedback. Below are some examples of comments that

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are typical of this section:

“By far the biggest problem is monitoring. It is difficult to hear 3 X 3-student discussions...as they are spread across the room. There is also less variety: 8-student classes allow pair work and 4-student groups, while 9-student classes are more repetitive- not everyone can be paired so some students are always in groups of 3 (for preparation activities AND the discussions themselves).”

“On Thursdays I teach two 9 student classes and one group of 8. When I compare class notes and assessment sheets, it is clear that I have more data, comments and examples of student speech on my 8 student notes, which allows me to write better quality feedback and assign grades more accurately. “

For the second question, twenty two instructors (92%) chose “yes,” one chose “no,” and the other said “unsure.” The instructors all had experiences of teaching 5-student classes due to student absences; their comments were based on their observation of 5-student discussions. To summarize the comments from those who chose “yes,” the following five tendencies in students’ behavior during 5-student discussions were found: 1) shy students can hide easily, 2) active students can dominate discussions easily, 3) unmotivated students can slack off easily, 4) the discussion becomes more like a presentation with one speaker and four listeners and the speaker feels nervous, and 5) speaking time per student is reduced. The following comments may serve as an illustration to these points:

“I think 5 student discussions groups are too large and should only be used as a last resort. The dynamics of interaction change and often students over compensate for larger groups and the discussion becomes a turn taking presentation of ideas.”

“In general, 5-student discussions are difficult for both students and teachers. For students, the added group member makes it more difficult for them to participate equally, as quieter students find it easier to be passive in the discussion, while students who tend to dominate find it easier to control the discussions. as a result, 5-member discussions are marked by poorer speaking and question balance, and they also tend to impair a smooth flow of ideas within the group. For teachers, it becomes harder to monitor and provide effective feedback. The result is that students’ performance often suffers, in part due to the fact that teachers’ ability to monitor and provide feedback is decreased.”

While the majority raised difficulties with 5-student classes, two instructors held different views. Their opinions were minority, yet hold value for further investigation. One of these with different views chose “no,” reporting that he had not experienced any problems with 5-student discussions. It would be interesting to find out why he did not experience any problems. From other instructors’ comments, it was quite clear that instructors’ experiences with 5-student classes are different from those with classes with 4-student discussion groups in terms of teaching and/or learning, yet it does not mean those differences are always problematic. Therefore exchange of ideas about how to handle 5-student classes may prove useful for instructors. The other instructor who chose “unsure” said that it was difficult to answer the question with any accuracy without quantitative data. In fact, the same thing can be said about answering other questions in this questionnaire survey. For example, formal research has not

been done to support any of the five claims listed above about 9-student classes or 5-student discussions. Similarly, differences in levels of student achievement between 9-student and eight-student classes in terms of test scores and final grades have not been formally examined.

However, what the majority of the instructors' comments from this section reveal is that their concerns with 9-student classes or 5-student discussions are real and common across instructors: they invest time and effort to do their best in their 9-student or 5-student classes to remove any of the potential disadvantages that they observe through their instructions.

Section 4: 10-student classes under the current curriculum

The questions in this section and the following sections are in regard to 10-student classes. The question for this section was as follows: If the average size of an EDC classes was changed to 10 students per class, would you be able to maintain the same teaching methodology, quality of teaching, and achievement of learning outcomes? There were yes or no answer choices and a comment section for each question. Out of 24 instructors, 22 (92%) chose "no," 2 chose "yes" with minor adjustments to teaching.

From the comments of instructors who chose "no," seven major reasons were drawn out: 1) there would be less student-student talking time in each class, 2) there would be less individual attention to students' needs due to lower student to instructor ratio, 3) there would be less teaching time in each class, 4) feedback and assessment would be less accurate due to larger number of students per class, and 5) more students would mean increased classroom management issues, 6) more students would mean a greater chance of mixed ability classes, and 7) more students would mean increase in teacher-talking time to repeat instructions and organizing activities.

"If we divide into three groups (3,3,4), this is a problem for teacher monitoring and it becomes harder to observe each individual student. Students get less quality feedback, and how can students improve without effective feedback on performance? If we divide into two groups (5, 5), student talking time is reduced, and this can also impact the performance of quieter students."

"A ten student class would maintain the ability to conduct pair work. However, it would make accurate monitoring on the part of the teacher more difficult, which would directly impact the effectiveness of the feedback, and therefore student learning outcomes. In addition, 5-member group discussions have radically different dynamics from 4-member groups, often suffering poorer interaction and speaking balance."

The two instructors who chose "yes" both mentioned that the structure of one lesson, particularly time devoted to each activity, would need to be adjusted though the same teaching methodology, quality of teaching, and achievement of learning outcomes could be maintained to some extent.

Section 5: Necessary curriculum adjustments for 10-student classes

The question for this section was what curriculum changes instructors considered necessary in case the average size of an EDC class was increased to 10 students per class. Instructors were free to provide multiple choices, and all the instructors provided one or more answers. Figure 4 below summarizes the results in percentages.

There are four competing areas of EDC teaching, "Classroom management" (27% of all responses), "High student speaking time" (21%), "Assessment methods" (20%), and "Student-

centered instruction” (18%), that instructors consider necessary to change from the current curriculum if the class size went up to 10 students. They felt that there would be a marked increase in the classroom management issues that they occasionally faced, such as lateness, absences, use of Japanese, shy students, and dominant students. They also felt that expected student speaking time would need to be decreased from 50 minutes per class (an average time spent for student speaking time in regular EDC lessons) as it would be difficult to hold two extended discussions with 10 students within 90 minutes. Contrary, they expected that teacher-talking time would increase with 10-student classes as they would need to spend more time on activity set up and concept checking, which, in turn, means that their instruction would become less student-centered. In other words, lesson procedure changes would be required if the class size became 10. Furthermore, as instructors would not be able to monitor and grade the performance of 10 students as closely, changes would be required to both regular lesson and test lesson assessment methods with new criteria that would allow instructors to assess students accurately and fairly. In short, the majority agree that significant changes to the course structure would need to be made if changing the class size to 10.

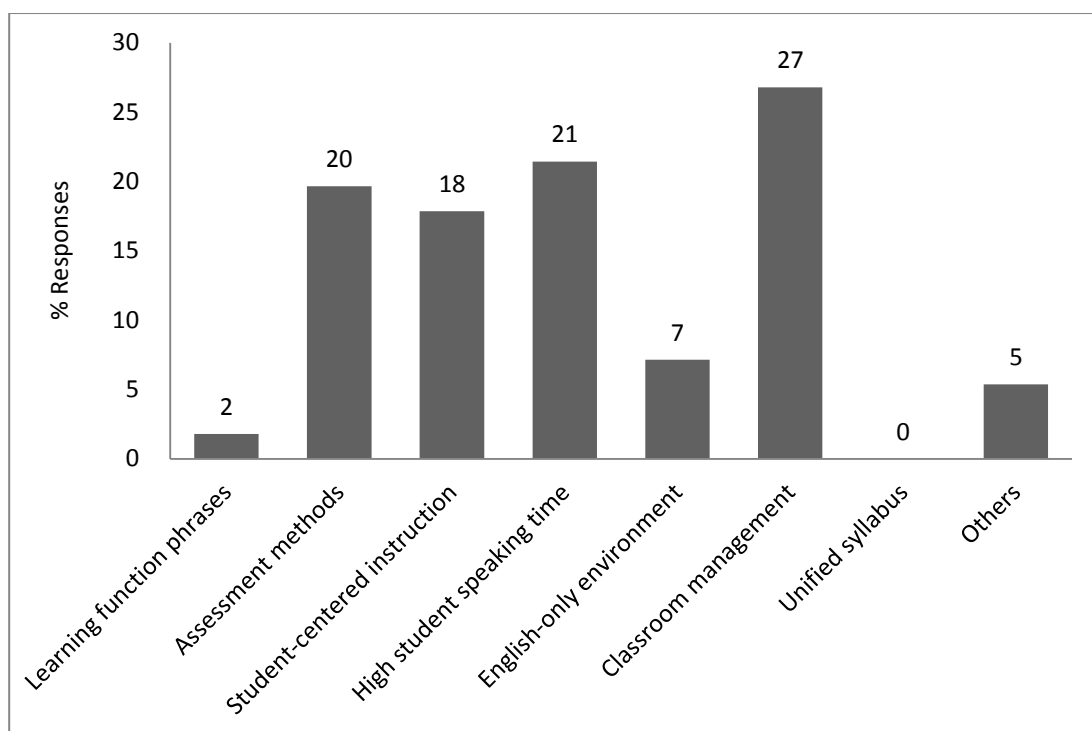


Figure 4. Areas of adjustments necessary for 10-student classes.

Section 6: Ideal class size under the current curriculum

In this section, there were seven answer options for the ideal number of students per class ranging from 6 to more than 10. All 24 instructors chose “8.” Among them, four instructors listed other options together with “8”: two listed “9,” one listed “6,” and the other listed “12.” The fact that 100% of the instructors said “8” is the ideal class size is hardly surprising as the entire course was planned around the principle of having eight students per class, for example activities in the textbook and the teacher’s guide assume students would be mostly working in

pairs or groups of four and so does the teacher training sessions. Furthermore, various minor adjustments are made regularly to the course on the same principle and based on instructors' feedback since EDC started, and as instructors gain more experiences, they become more skilled to teach "8" students.

DISCUSSION

If any conclusions may be drawn from the results of this questionnaire survey, they are, perhaps, as follows. The current standard class size of 8 presumably works well both for students and instructors. There seem to be two major factors why instructors strongly feel that eight is the ideal number of students per class: monitoring and feedback.

EDC instructors monitor students' performance closely in each lesson to assign grades to individual students. In EDC, students receive grades for function use, communication skills, and participation after each lesson based on their classroom performance. Such grades are made available to students online so that they have an opportunity to reflect on their performance and prepare for the succeeding lesson. Many instructors mentioned "accuracy" in their comments for Section 4 and 5 above when they discussed how monitoring becomes difficult with classes with 9 or 10 students, saying that their notes on student performance would not be as detailed as for 8-student classes. This affects their ability to assign grades that truly reflect students' performance, thus they worry that in larger classes, grades become meaningless for students' learning as students might not feel that their grades accurately reflect their performance.

Instructors were equally concerned with the feedback method in larger classes. The present practice is that instructors provide feedback to students after each task on points well done and points to improve. Generally instructors provide feedback five times or more in one lesson, and their feedback includes two types of information: verification and elaboration (Kulhavy and Stock, 1989). The former type refers to simple judgment and the latter refers to additional information such as explaining errors, providing examples, introducing new strategies and so on. In EDC classrooms, instructors comment on how well students complete each task and explain what progress (or lack of) they make from task to task and within a course of a 90-minute lesson. The EDC curriculum is designed in a way that students can achieve goals and objectives of the course by build on skills in subsequent tasks and lessons; therefore, it is crucial that instructors gather formative data through monitoring student performance during the lesson. Monitoring, therefore, goes beyond simply noting down whether or not students used certain expressions or not; what instructors try to achieve in every lesson is formative feedback that brings a direct and positive influence in students' performance and progress. Instructors feel that it is more difficult to achieve in larger classes.

While formative feedback is regarded to be crucial to improve students' skills in the educational field (Heritage, 2010; Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006; Tuttle & Tuttle, 2012), not only EDC instructors, but also students also consider feedback to be important part of their learning. The end of semester student questionnaire includes two items related to teacher feedback: 1) my teacher gave clear instructions and explanations in class, and 2) the teachers' weekly comments on the website were helpful. The former item concerns with teacher talk in class. Although the item does not use the word, formative feedback, specifically, it is certainly part of "instructions and explanations" from students' perspective. Every semester, 90 % of the respondents agree with this item on average. The latter item refers to written comments students receives online after each lesson along with their grades. Because the web system is not interactive, it is difficult for EDC to know whether students actually read the comments, or they just checked their grades without reading the comments. However, the average of 80 % of the respondents agrees with the item every semester. It is clear that instructor feedback is seen as something useful by both

students and instructors to an overwhelming degree.

To the curriculum developers, the results of the questionnaire survey came as no surprise as other key aspects of the curriculum (i.e., textbook activities, teaching methodologies, and assessment methods) were developed around the standard class size of eight. In retrospect, the class size and the educational aims complemented each other in the process of the EDC curriculum development. Yet, the results provided both the initial and current curriculum developers with reassurance that the decision on the class size was sensible despite the fact that there were no obvious supporting evidence from literature in the field.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Class size seems to be a very important factor in CLT, yet further research is necessary to gain insights about how different class sizes affect students' learning outcomes. Empirical studies that compare students' achievement levels between small size classes (it seems to be the common practice that universities describe their English classes as small sized when there are fifteen to twenty students) and bigger size classes with the same or similar educational aims and goals would shed some light on this topic, providing useful information for all the curriculum developers in the field. Within EDC, it would be interesting to compare 7-, 8-, and 9- student classes to see if there are any significant differences in learning outcomes. Hunter (2013) investigated whether test group size affected individual test performance on the discussion test, comparing 3-student groups and 4-student groups. The motivation behind this study was the "anecdotal observation" made by many EDC instructors that 4-student test groups seemed to perform better than 3-student test groups in the test (p. 143). Similarly, EDC instructors' observations of student performance with regard to different class sizes or group sizes (i.e. 5-student discussions) discussed in this paper can be investigated further.

NOTES ON MAKING CHANGES

Once a curriculum is in place, on-going evaluation of the curriculum is necessary to maintain its relevancy and quality. The EDC curriculum developers operate on the mutual understanding that "the process of curriculum development is never finished" (Brown, 1995, p. 217). At EDC, it is not difficult to put this belief into practice since there are numerous opportunities for them to receive instructor feedback on a day to day basis through regular professional development sessions and frequent informal communications with instructors. Conducting this questionnaire survey became another opportunity to hear instructor voices and gain insights about the class size.

Furthermore, EDC being a newly established compulsory course for all freshman students, ideas for changes or adjustments to the curriculum were brought up to the curriculum developers at times by members of the university to ensure that EDC was a sustainable program for years to come. One of these suggestions, as mentioned earlier, was in regard to the standard class size. The results of the questionnaire survey provided rich information regarding instructor perceptions of the importance of class size in CLT classrooms, namely the relationship between class size and monitoring/feedback, and the relationship between class size and learning outcomes. Such results convinced members of the university that the standard class size of eight as the core of the current curriculum would be maintained. In light of Nation and Macalister's (2010) suggested steps in introducing changes to a curriculum, this process corresponds to the first step of assessing the need for change:

If a language course is not achieving the results that it should, or if the nature of the course causes dissatisfaction for the teachers or learners, then one of the first

prerequisites for change is present. (p. 174)

In any language curriculum, changes can be made either top-down or bottom-up. Sometimes changes are made top-down, for example due to administrative reasons (e.g., structural reform to English courses). Changes are also made bottom-up based on what happens in classrooms (e.g., students' dissatisfaction with a course). Either way, evaluation of a curriculum, as a whole or some aspects of it, is necessary to determine what needs to be changed or if the need for change exists. When doing so, it is optimal if the evaluation process becomes cooperative work (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004). It is imperative that voices of the key players in a language curriculum, teachers and students, are not neglected at this evaluation stage (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004; Nation & Macalister, 2010; Richards, 2001) so that the changes (or no changes) are relevant. That said, EDC underwent a very healthy and successful process in evaluating the effectiveness of the standard class size, consulting the student questionnaire results and instructors' opinions reported in this paper, in which people concerned are confident with the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

In the questionnaire survey briefly reported here, EDC instructors willingly shared their experiences and views on the current EDC curriculum. In doing so, they have made a valuable contribution to EDC in maintaining its quality. Equally worth emphasizing is that they also contributed to increased understanding of the importance of teachers' voices in evaluating any aspects of a language program. Student voices are often heard through means of student evaluations; however, only when teachers' feedback is analyzed together with student evaluations, curriculum developers and others that oversee the program are able to gain many more insights into the program. It is hoped that this report will have demonstrated that voices at different levels of the educational system (e.g., students, teachers, managers, etc.) are essential in understanding any aspects of any language courses.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire on Educational Effectiveness

Your Name:

- Every semester, we conduct a questionnaire to discern students' opinions about our program, and our program has been well received thus far. Why do you think our program is **effective** in developing students' speaking skills? Please choose Top 3 reasons.

A	Learning function phrases	B	Micro class size
C	Student-centered instruction (teacher presentation, monitoring, and feedback)	D	High student speaking time (student-student interaction)
E	Unified syllabus (within EDC)	F	Assessment methods (Weekly assessment and DT)
G	Provision of English-only-environment	H	Classroom management
I	Others (please specify)		

No. 1	
No. 2	
No. 3	
Why do you think so?	

- Why do you think our program is **popular** with our students? Please choose Top 3 reasons.

A	Learning function phrases	B	Micro class size
C	Student-centered instruction (teacher presentation, monitoring,	D	High student speaking time (student-student interaction)

	and feedback)		
E	Unified syllabus (within EDC)	F	Assessment methods (Weekly assessment and DT)
G	Provision of English-only- environment	H	Classroom management
I	Others (please specify)		

No. 1	
No. 2	
No. 3	
Why do you think so?	

3. Questions below are specifically about **9-student-classes**, and if you have not taught any 9-student-classes, please do not answer these questions.
- a. In terms of effective teaching and learning, do you see any differences between 8- and 9- student classes?

Yes / No:
Please explain your answer with examples.

- b. During group discussions in 9-student-classes, students are divided in groups of 3 in order to maximize student-student interaction time. If we changed this format to two groups of 4 and 5, do you think there would be any difference in students' performance and learning outcomes?

Yes / No:
Please explain your answer with examples.

4. If the average size of an EDC class was changed to 10 students per class, would you be able to maintain the same teaching methodology, quality of teaching, and achievement of learning outcomes?

Yes / No:
Please explain your answer with examples.

5. If the average size of an EDC class was changed to 10 students per class, which of the following would need to change and how?

A	Learning function phrases	B	Assessment methods (Weekly assessment and DT)
C	Student-centered instruction (teacher presentation, monitoring, and feedback)	D	High student speaking time (student- student interaction)
E	Provision of English-only- environment	F	Classroom management
G	Unified syllabus (within EDC)	H	Others (please specify)

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Please explain your answer with examples.

6. Which of the following do you think would be ideal for our students?

	Number of students per class
A	Less than 6
B	6 students
C	7 students
D	8 students
E	9 students
F	10 students
G	More than 10

Your choice	
Please explain your answer.	